

Scientific Narrative

See attached PHI application for details. Briefly, we seek PHI funding to (i) conduct a follow-up phone survey focused on worker mental health approximately one week after a large scale experiment in Bangladeshi garment factories that offers treated workers the opportunity to report sexual and physical harassment through hard garbling (HG) techniques that ensures plausible deniability, and (ii) use the random assignment to HG to assess the causal impact of the ability to report harassment in a secure way on workers' mental health.

We seek \$15,410.67 USD in matching funding from CSDE to (i) include physical health data collection in our PHI-funded round and (ii) conduct a second follow-up survey on physical and mental health approximately 4 weeks after workers' opportunity to report harassment through HG. These survey activities serve three key purposes: (i) we can examine the physical health benefits, particularly among pregnant and perinatal women and provide an additional survey rounds that allows us to (ii) assess dynamic effects of reporting harassment on worker health and (iii) pool both survey rounds to increase power.

The time path of effects is an important input into the policy recommendations and future funding opportunities of this activity. We propose in our PHI application to test for mental health effects one week after the opportunity to disclose harassment, which will be an important proof of concept of potential welfare improvements. These effects will be all the more compelling if they persist after one month. They may even compound if workers' relief at disclosing a secret is realized over time.

This boost in power from pooling both rounds has been shown to be particularly salient in situations where outcomes are noisy and serial correlation is low (McKenzie 2012). This situation applies to the sample of Bangladeshi garment workers, who face a variety of life challenges (health shocks, relationship struggles, etc.) that affect their mental health at various points in time. Indeed, in parallel ongoing data collection conducted by PI Heath, persistent individual effects explain 46% of variation in mental health across monthly survey rounds; the remaining 54% vary within-person over time.

Fit with PDB

This project fits within the PDB branch's focus on population health, focusing on the socio-economic factors that affect population health. There is a growing attention to mental health issues in low-income countries, and the population of Bangladeshi garment workers that we study is no exception. Indeed, in ongoing data collection by PI Heath, 29% of garment workers report feelings of depression at least one day in the past week and 40% report feeling hopeless at least one day. Moreover, workers face physical harassment

which could be particularly harmful to pregnant and perinatal workers, who are very common in the young, heavily female population of garment workers: 74% of women workers in the ongoing data collection of PI Heath have children.

Workers' poor health has been linked in qualitative studies to harassment in the workplace (Begum et al, 2010; Akter Teicher and Alam, 2024). Factories have been shown to have market power in the labor market (Bossavie, Cho, and Heath, 2023), leading workers to have difficulty finding another job if they face harassment or poor working conditions. Workers thus would benefit from actions taken by their current firm to reduce harassment, but they fear retaliation if they report harassment to firms and outside enforcement agencies who can address it.

Amidst this backdrop, we assess whether a survey-based mechanism that allows workers to report harassment in a way that guarantees plausible deniability improves their mental and physical health. If so, project results will be an important input into implementing a HG project at national scale. NGO's such as the Amader Kotha (AK) Helpline (with whom PI Ali has worked on a related project on reporting of sensitive information in the workplace) are potential partners in this activity; the AK Helpline sought out Ali and collaborators to design secure ways to allow workers to report harassment and other sensitive issues.

Budget

A second survey round we propose to conduct with CSDE funding will be cost effective, because the enumerators will already be trained in the survey instrument, participants will be familiar with the questions, and the survey will already be translated and coded in survey CTO. We thus seek \$15,410.67 USD from CSDE for the following budget items:

- \$6184: Enumerator time (team of 14 enumerators paid 2400 taka or 15.06 USD at the current exchange rate each for 22 days). Eighty four of these person-days will cover the physical health module in the initial survey.
- \$3556: Supervisory personnel time. (Research associate for 1 month at 300,000 taka/2510.14 USD; Research fellow for 0.25 months at 500,000 taka/4183.57 USD per month)
- \$5670: Compensation for respondents (150 taka/1.26 USD X 4500 participants).

References

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Bossavie, Laurent, Yoonyoung Cho, and Rachel Heath. "The effects of international scrutiny on manufacturing workers: Evidence from the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh." *Journal of Development Economics* 163 (2023): 103107.

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